

# **MEDIA RELEASE**

February 19, 2003

KBI Director Larry Welch announced today that, for the first time in a decade, there was a reduction last year in the number of illegal methamphetamine laboratories seized in Kansas. Final figures show 728 methamphetamine labs reported seized in calendar year 2002, down 118 from the 846 labs reported in 2001.

"This is a tribute to the men and women of Kansas law enforcement who are risking their lives everyday in this fight. Hopefully this shows we are finally making progress against this scourge" said Director Larry Welch.

Federal statistics regularly place Kansas in the top 5 states for seizures of methamphetamine labs in the country. Due to the chemicals used in clandestine laboratories the production of methamphetamine has far more dangerous consequences than other drug violations. Injuries to children present in homes where methamphetamine is made, the presence of deadly fumes during raids, toxic contamination of land and water and the fires and explosions connected to methamphetamine production all contribute to why methamphetamine has been the KBI's top priority for several years.

Director Welch credited several factors for the apparent reduction. The legislature increased penalties for methamphetamine production in 1999, several federal grants have enabled the KBI to hire agents and forensic chemists, as well as train, equip and certify more than 250 local law enforcement officers in handling methamphetamine labs. He also praised the Meth Watch program that the KBI and Kansas Department of Health and Environment operate to educate retailers on methamphetamine precursors.

Director Welch qualified the apparent success. "Unfortunately the number of methamphetamine lab cases submitted for analysis to the KBI forensic laboratory actually increased last year by 33. That may indicate local law enforcement officers are busy working more labs but not submitting all the paperwork. The other is the financial crisis. With the federal deficit and homeland security issues the federal grants that have been so vital to the efforts may not continue. There is also SB 123 before the Kansas legislature that would release hundreds of prisoners convicted on methamphetamine charges and reduce penalties for methamphetamine possession to save prison space and money. So we may have to wait to see how real and lasting is the success we may have accomplished."

More information and statistic are available at the KBI web site:

<http://www.accesskansas.org/drug enforcement/>

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